

Contributor Profile: South Korea¹

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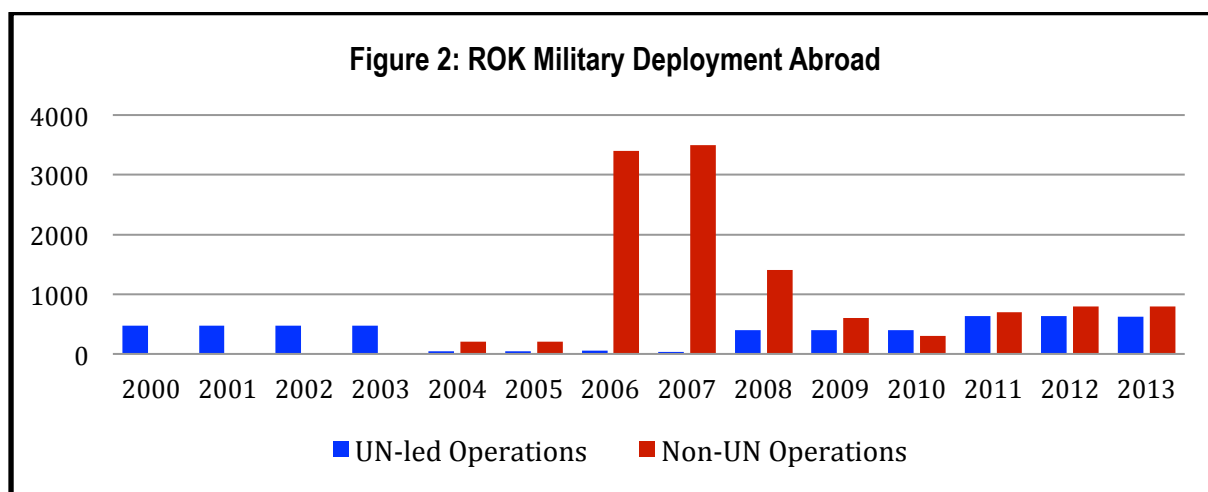
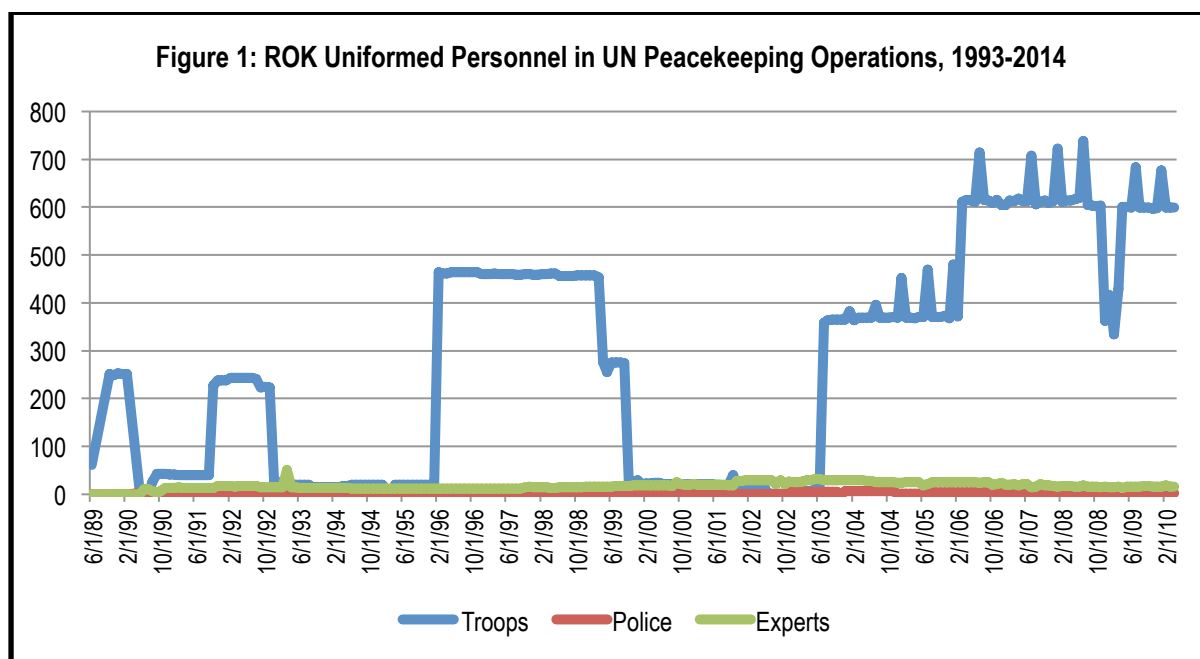
Active Armed Forces ²	Helicopters	Defense Budget	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
655,000 World Ranking (size) : 6 th Army 522,000 Navy 68,000 (inc. 28,000 Marines) Air Force 65,000 Paramilitary 4,500 Reserve 4,500,000	Attack: 60 Multi-role: 189 Transport: 275 (23 heavy, 133 medium, 119 light) Search & Rescue: 16 Anti-Submarine Warfare: 24	2013: US\$31.85bn (2.53% of GDP) 2012: US\$29.3bn (2.54% of GDP) 2011: US\$28.3bn (2.54% of GDP)	618 (19 female) (30 April 2014) Ranking 35 th (3 rd largest contributor among the OECD states; 5 th largest from the East Asia-Pacific region)	MINURSO: 4 experts MINUSTAH: 2 troops UNAMID: 2 troops UNIFIL: 321 troops UNMIL: 5 (3 police, 1 expert, 1 troop) UNMISS: 275 (2 experts, 273 troops) UNMOGIP: 7 experts UNOCI: 2 experts	Afghanistan ISAF: 350 Gulf of Aden: CTF-151 Navy: 1 DDGHM UAE: 140 (training activities at UAE Spec Ops School)
Defense Spending / troop: ³ approx. US\$48,620 (compared to global average of approx. US\$70,300)					

Part 1: Recent Trends

During the 21st century, the Republic of Korea (hereafter, Korea) has shown a sharp decline followed by a resurgence of commitment to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations. In the early 2000s, the number of Korean UN peacekeepers was over 450. Then, from 2003 to mid-2007, the number dropped significantly and averaged about 42 over the period. This decline coincided with the Iraq War in 2003, to which Korea dispatched a significant number of troops to support the US-led coalition's operations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Northern Iraq (see figure 2). The Korean civil-military operations (CMO) unit in Iraq, the so-called "*Zaytun Division*," comprised of over 3,500 uniformed personnel and was deployed from September 2004 to December 2008. From July 2007, however, Korea not only recovered its previous level of commitment to UN peacekeeping it expanded the number of troops committed, the scope of their work, and areas of operation. Korea tries to keep at least two fully-organized units deployed on UN missions (currently an engineering unit serves in UNMISS and a mechanized infantry unit serves in UNIFIL). It currently provides over 600 UN peacekeepers, although its contribution peaked at 760 troops in July 2012. Traditionally, Korean peacekeeping contributions have been mainly engineers and medics but small contingents of infantry units have accompanied them when operational circumstances require force protection.

The increase in Korea's contribution to UN peacekeeping after 2007 reflects its willingness to become a more proactive contributor. Since late 2009, the Korean government has initiated a series of legal and institutional measures to lay the groundwork for future participation in UN peacekeeping. These measures include the passage of the [Law on Participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations](#) in December 2009, the strengthening and expansion of the

Peacekeeping Center at the National Defense University in January 2010, and the creation of the International Peace Support Force (known as *Onnuri Unit*), which is essentially a standing unit designated for overseas deployment.⁴



Part 2: Decision-Making Process

Any decision to send troops abroad, including peacekeepers, usually involves a complex and often time-consuming process of securing political capital, performing public diplomacy activities, undertaking legal authorization procedures, and doing administrative as well as logistical preparation. As a latecomer to UN peacekeeping,⁵ Korea at first lacked clear and specific guidelines for contributing and there were lengthy bureaucratic and parliamentary deliberations that resulted in troop deployment delays.⁶ However, during the past several years, Korea's peacekeeping-related decision-making process has become fairly predictable, transparent and much more institutionalized. Most notably, the [Law on Participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations](#), which was supplemented by a [related presidential decree in June 2010](#), stipulates how the government should handle and consider requests for

peacekeepers from the UN. The law contains a clear working definition of UN peacekeeping, provides a legal basis for establishing standing units for peacekeeping, sets out principles to ensure performance, parliamentary procedures for deployment approval as well as the extension and termination of operations, requires activity reports to parliament and establishes an inter-agency policy consultation committee. In fact, the very recent deployment to UNMISS took over a year to get approval within the ROK government leading to a big engineering shortage in the mission.⁷

The Korean government's decision-making process involves an executive decision and parliamentary approval. First, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Ministry of National Defense (MND) jointly play a central role in decision-making on the part of the executive branch. After the UN makes a formal request or invitation, the MOFA and MND form an inter-agency policy consultation committee, which is required by law and chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to review and respond to the request. A vice-ministerial level sub-committee is also organized to facilitate more effective cooperation among larger inter-agency working groups. In the meantime, an inter-agency investigation team is dispatched to the potential operation sites to report to the committee on operational conditions. Upon completion of the preliminary review and on-site investigation, the MND prepares an implementation plan that includes the necessary details such as mission objectives and duration, potential hostilities, required troop size and composition, command and control arrangements, the types of weapons and equipment that would be needed, the logistical requirements, and other operational matters. Then, the committee prepares a comprehensive policy recommendation that sets the government's advice regarding the UN's request and submits it to the cabinet meeting as a review agenda. When the President determines and approves the agenda at the cabinet meeting, the executive decision-making process is concluded. Although this seems a little complex, the deployment decision can be processed in an expedited manner, since the peacekeeping law pre-authorizes the provisional agreements with the UN if certain conditions are met.⁸

[Under Article 60, Section 2 of the Korean Constitution](#), the National Assembly has the right to consent to the dispatch of armed forces to foreign states. As a general rule of thumb, this parliamentary approval process is relatively clear-cut because the National Assembly may either approve or reject support for the UN's request and previous deployments have smoothly passed the parliamentary process. Nevertheless, the parliamentary process could cause potential problems in cases where there is public sensitivity about a particular mission or domestic political complications.

Technically, there remain just two steps for the final approval once the government submits a peacekeeping deployment motion to the National Assembly. First, the National Defense Committee (NDC) will review the motion. While the review process is underway, the legislators may request additional information and briefings about the motion to the government and set their opinions. The National Assembly Research Service (NARS) also plays a role in assisting the legislators to review the request with its analysis and recommendation. In the meantime, the NDC may hold public hearings on the matter. As soon as the NDC decides and passes the motion, it will be referred to a plenary session (*bonhoieui*) of the National Assembly. The second and final step of the approval process is the plenary session vote on the motion.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political Rationales: Korea views participation in UN peacekeeping as a useful political instrument which it can use to advance its national interests in a variety of dimensions especially by enhancing its international status, presenting an image of an active player in global governance, expanding its diplomatic outreach, and perhaps most importantly, securing international support vis-à-vis North Korea.

A second set of political rationales relate to regional competition. As a [commanding officer of a Korean peacekeeping unit](#) put it, “we need to actively participate in PKOs as do China and Japan.” Korea’s contributions exhibit surprising parallels with Japanese contributions, suggesting a political competition between them as often claimed especially by Korean academics. As most recent cases – e.g. Haiti and South Sudan – demonstrate, the Korean government decided to deploy to missions that Japan also deployed to, though its contingent in Haiti was much smaller than Japan’s. Korea’s deployment to South Sudan in 2013 equaled the size of the Japanese contribution but was made about a year later. In addition to this rivalry with Japan, the rise of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in UN peacekeeping has increased pressure on Seoul to contribute. There exists a kind of regional rivalry among the Northeast Asian countries, which can be an influencing element in Korea’s decision to participate in UN peacekeeping.

Another political rationale is the ambition to support the Korean Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon. One study found “a marked tendency for contributing states to support a UN Secretary-General of their own nationality [quoting examples of Burma, Peru and Egypt].”⁹ This might have been a factor in South Korea’s decision to join UNIFIL in Lebanon in 2007. Since this mission involved the first deployment of a Korean combat unit to a UN peacekeeping operation it faced strong domestic opposition.

Economic Rationales: Economic factors are not major considerations in Korea’s decision to commit troops to UN peacekeeping because its deployment costs are often significantly higher than UN reimbursements. Moreover, Korea’s UN peacekeepers are deployed in places far away from Korea – which adds extra financial burdens and logistical challenges for Seoul – and hint at the fact that the country has little commercial interest in peacekeeping. However, this does not mean that economic considerations are entirely irrelevant. Korea pays the 12th largest share of the UN assessed peacekeeping budget and has sometimes failed to pay its dues on time.¹⁰ Moreover, its budgetary constraints make additional voluntary financial contributions unlikely in the future. Thus, its actual troop commitment can be viewed as a way of Korea [signaling willingness](#) to physically augment and financially assist UN peacekeeping.

Security Rationales: Korea’s participation in UN peacekeeping does not directly relate to its core security interests. Currently, Korean units are widely dispersed in places where the security implications for Korea are not readily identifiable. Yet, The country's contribution to global security can increase the possibility to secure international support in the event its security situation becomes dangerous

Institutional Rationales: From a military perspective, Korea’s participation in UN peacekeeping provides valuable opportunities for gaining operational experience and experience in multinational operations. At home, Korean armed forces have a combined

command and control mechanism with the US Forces in Korea (USFK) and thereby achieve two-directional communication and information sharing as well as a high level of combat readiness. These capabilities, provided by the US, are obviously not to be found in UN peacekeeping operations, providing good experience to Korean soldiers. UN missions can face a number of operational challenges, such as multi-national operations, fragmented command and control, delayed collaboration, and so forth. Whilst these problems deter some potential contributors, Korea tries to see them as inevitable conditions and to use these conditions to add to the experience and capabilities of its own personnel. At the command level, Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) can develop multilateral cooperation techniques. Also, individual officers and soldiers are able to improve their leadership, language, and problem solving skills.

Normative Rationales: Korea sees participation in UN peacekeeping as part of its obligations as a UN member and believes that it makes a valuable contribution to international peace and security as a whole. These considerations are amplified by the sense that South Korea is a "child of the UN" and has a political debt to pay.¹¹ Korean politicians often make reference to the UN intervention in the Korean War in international forums such as the General Assembly general debate.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Alternative Political or Strategic Priorities: The principal barrier to contributing to UN peacekeeping is the current military confrontation on the Korean peninsula. Ongoing tensions and North Korean violations of the armistice force the Korean government to retain a strong defense presence at home and limit its ability to deploy significant numbers of troops overseas. Although the [peacekeeping law](#) permits the government to create a standing unit for swift deployment to UN missions, implementation remains at the embryonic stage. An additional consideration is Korea's commitment to the US alliance. Because of its close alliance with the US, Korea committed several thousand troops to the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which resulted in an effective withdrawal from its contributions to UN peacekeeping missions between 2004 and 2006. The South Korean military has only a limited capacity to deploy troops while still maintaining normal operations at home. Troops deployed in support of US coalitions are therefore not available for UN service, and because of the centrality of the US alliance to its own defense, Korea privileges commitments to the US over commitments to the UN.

Difficult domestic politics: Traditionally, the Korean public has perceived UN peacekeeping positively for they remember the UN's contribution to Korea's independence and economic wellbeing. Unlike the overseas deployments to controversial US-led missions that triggered considerable domestic opposition, there exists bipartisan support for UN-led peacekeeping. Nevertheless, safety concerns are of paramount importance to the Korean public. If the security of Korean peacekeepers is seriously endangered, public opinion is likely to become unfavorable. Most recently, in late 2013 the deteriorating situation in South Sudan, which included mortar shells landing in the vicinity of Korean peacekeepers, was widely reported in Korea and provoked public concerns about the safety of its peacekeepers.

Financial costs: Financial cost is unlikely to be a barrier to Korea maintaining its current level of participation in UN peacekeeping, but Korea, at times, may find it difficult to cope with new requests due to the inflexibility of the Korean national budgetary process. Korea's

budgetary process is subject to parliamentary oversight and tends to be politicized. Thus, it often proves to be cumbersome. Technically, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) budget for peacekeeping is treated as a fixed budget account and leaves little room for later adjustments.

Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues

In 2013, a troop safety issue arose in relation to the Korean *Hanbit Unit* (in UNMISS) stationed in Bor, the capital city of the State of Jonglei in South Sudan.¹² Rebel forces increased activities in the vicinity of the unit and, reportedly, there were numerous exchanges of gunfire between the government troops and rebels. Since the Korean peacekeeping unit is comprised of mostly lightly armed engineers and has insufficient ammunition for their small firearms – the unit temporarily borrowed 10,000 rounds for 5.56mm automatic rifles from the Japanese SDF stationed in Juba – the current local situation is worrisome. Alarmed by this security deterioration, Korean military authorities in Seoul carried out a resupply mission via two C-130H transport planes, but the actual delivery was delayed as the local conditions hindered smooth progress. This demonstrates how difficult and unpredictable UN peacekeeping might become and poses significant challenges for the Korean commitment to peacekeeping well into the future.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

The incumbent UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon who had spent most of his public service career in the Korean government as a diplomat is unmistakably the most influential person when it comes to Korean decision-making on UN peacekeeping. Under his leadership in Korea's Foreign Ministry, there are a number of foreign policy experts and senior diplomats who enthusiastically support UN peacekeeping. Among political figures, the former commander of UNFICYP in 2002, Gen. Hwang Jin-ha (LTG, ret.) – whose nickname is “peacekeeping preacher” – now serves as a member of the National Assembly. He played a crucial role in the passing of the peacekeeping law and in establishing the Peacekeeping Center as well as the standing unit, *Onnuri*. Former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Dr. Han Seung-soo is also an internationally well-known figure, as he was elected the President of the 56th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2001 while he was serving as Foreign Minister of Korea. He is a staunch supporter of UN peacekeeping and now also serves as Chair of the High-Level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters and as a member of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation. Other prominent policy figures that support UN peacekeeping include the former Korean ambassador to the UN, Park Soo-gil and the former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Cyprus, Choi Young-jin.

Despite the fact that UN peacekeeping generally receives large public support in Korea, there are some groups of political activists who are inclined to see Korea's overseas military commitment as dangerous military adventures. Most of them have progressive/leftist political orientations and frequently demonstrate against overseas deployment. The most visible groups include Korea Alliance of Progressive Movements (진보연대), Solidarity for Peace and Reunification of Korea (평통사), and People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (참여연대).

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

The South Sudan experience shows that decisions about future troop deployments could be complicated by casualties, as the National Assembly process outlined above could be expected to take longer and could be more focused on safety. An additional issue to consider is that Korea imposes its own sunset clauses on overseas deployments. Under Article 8 of the peacekeeping law, a new peacekeeping deployment can be approved only for a period of one year and must be extended annually by the National Assembly thereafter.

Part 8: Further Reading

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- Park, Heung-soon, "UN PKOs. Korean Experiences and Lessons," in Park Soo-Gil et al., *The UN in the 21st Century. Enhancing the Effectiveness of the UN in the New Millennium* (in Korean) (Seoul: KACUNS, 2000).
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Notes

¹ Portions of this profile are drawn from the first author's paper: "Does Helmet Color Matter? Discrepancy in Korea's International Peace Operations," *Korean Political Science Review*, Vol.48, No.3, June 2014.

² Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from IISS, *The Military Balance 2014* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2014).

³ Armed Forces Spending is a country's annual defense budget (in US dollars) divided by the total number of active armed forces. Using figures from IISS, *The Military Balance 2014*.

⁴ As early as in August 1995, a peacekeeping department was established in the Joint Staff College, Korea National Defense University. The department was very modest in terms of aim and size. At the beginning, only three field-grade officers were in the department and they taught fairly basic curriculum regarding UN peacekeeping operations for a limited number of student officers who were fortunate enough to be admitted in the staff college. However, as the international demand for Korea's participation in UN PKOs increased, the Joint Staff College established the Peacekeeping Center in 2005.

⁵ Korea became a UN member state in September 1991. Korea's first peacekeeping mission was the Evergreen Unit which was deployed to UNSOM II in Somalia from July 1993 to February 1995.

⁶ Though not a UN mission, the Zaytun Unit's actual deployment to Northern Iraq was delayed about a year from the policy decision due to the changes in the subsequent mission coordination between the ROK and US military leaderships as well as in the local conditions for operation.

⁷ The UN requested Korean troop contribution to UNMISS in July 2011. However, the domestic legal process on the part of the Korean government took more than a year.

⁸ Under Article 6, Section 3 of the Law on Participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, the Korean government may make provisional agreements with the UN if all of the following conditions are met; (1) when the recipient country agreed to the PKO; (2) when the operation period is within one year; (3) in case of non-military mission or when direct involvement in combat or use of force is unlikely; and (4) when the UN requests prompt deployment.

⁹ Katsumi Ishizuka, *Ireland and International Peacekeeping Operations, 1960-2000: A Study of Irish Motivations* (Portland: Frank Cass, 2004)

¹⁰ The arrears issue has been resolved. The Korean government with the National Assembly's support was able to pay all the outstanding arrears in full by the end of 2013.

¹¹ Amadu Sesay, 'Dividends on Investments in History. Korea and UN Peace-keeping and Peace-building Operations', *Korea Observer*, 28 (2) 199, p. 86.

¹² The Hanbit Unit's safety issue first arose at the end of the year 2013. In the following months in 2014, the issue had raised the public concerns and policy debate in South Korea.